



Insights from a Chief Strategy Officer

This month we are debuting our interview series. We will periodically interview leaders in the legal industry who bring fresh perspectives that are sure to be of interest to our readers. We kick off with Julia Hayhoe, the Chief Strategy Officer at Baker McKenzie. Julia is based in London, has been with Baker McKenzie for 10 years and in her current role for three years. Before she joined Baker she was a management consultant to law firms and she holds an MBA degree from Manchester Business School.

Tell us about your role as Chief Strategy Officer at Baker McKenzie.

My role covers three primary areas of responsibility. The first is as a strategic advisor to the Chairman and the Global Executive Committee on external trends impacting our business. I focus on market trends among our competitors, with our clients and in the broader global economy. I talk regularly with our clients as well as market commentators and key external thinkers. I am also involved in looking at the digital side and innovation. We want to make sure we are regularly challenging our thinking in order to stay ahead of the market and adapt to our changing client and talent needs.

My second area of responsibility is as the lead on key strategic projects, particularly those around our priority markets (including the US, China and London). I conduct market evaluations for new markets we might be exploring and help to drive our lateral hiring and growth initiatives. I work on how we are adapting our underlying business model and I am particularly passionate about diversity and inclusion and spend time on those issues both within the firm and externally.

My third key area is around strategy implementation. I manage the firm's strategy route map (work plan) as well as make sure the KPIs (key performance indicators) are aligned and bring accountability. And I work to connect people across the firm to achieve different aspects of the strategy. I do an annual report to the partners on the market trends and our progress against key strategic initiatives.

What do you see as the biggest strategic challenges facing global law firms like Baker McKenzie?

We see certainly see changing client demands, but in particular that the new decision makers at clients (for hiring outside lawyers) are more diverse and are younger. On the talent side, there are changing demographics as millennials become a larger component of the workforce, and the resulting different ways of working. And finally, there are new competitors for legal work and talent. There are new entrants to the market, like the Big 4 accounting firms and technology companies, as well as fast growing firms from markets like China. The landscape is changing and the net effect is that clients and talent have far more choices and new expectations.

A unique aspect of global firms is scale. The focus by clients on achieving greater efficiency and better quality of user experience means that global firms in particular need to ensure effective service delivery and have the underlying technology platforms and processes to support that. Excellent quality of service delivery is as important as expertise for global clients.

What do you think firms need to do differently to succeed in today's competitive legal market?

Differentiation is critical. The market is fragmented and very crowded. Firms need to think hard about what value the firm brings above and beyond other legal organizations.

Firms need to start with the clients' business problem in mind and build the appropriate multi-disciplinary teams. So firms need to reshape client teams, which may need to include tax professionals, economists, technologists, talent specialists and other experts. Baker has always been multidisciplinary in nature, but few law firms today are well positioned to deliver these multi-disciplinary teams, and the accounting firms may have a head start.

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Leadership skills are increasingly critical to success. Firm's need leaders who can embody the strategy, tell the story, lead change, bring people together, and make sure things gets done. This requires investment, and Baker has been investing in leadership development for many years. Effective leaders need to be willing to have a growth mindset and take feedback. We actively encourage candor and feedback in the firm.

Culturally, firms need to be adaptable and willing to embrace change. This includes a willingness to evolve the culture, and perhaps let go of some behaviors that got you here but won't take you forward.

Collaboration is a top priority (and challenge) for many firms. How does Baker McKenzie encourage collaboration across the globe?

We see this fundamentally as a cultural question and we work to enable a culture of collaboration. While we have 1,600 partners and over 13,000 people, we are an agile firm, with many secondments across offices/jurisdictions and more informally on client matters. We hold global and regional partner meetings each year, along with industry, practice and other specialty meetings. We have many more informal structures, such as our 600+ innovation ambassadors. We have global client teams, and a global talent pipeline which is run at the practice group level and cuts across geographies. We have compensation incentives which reward global behavior. Ultimately collaboration comes down to culture and behaviors – and particularly to investing in spending time together.

What strategic initiative/priority inspires you or you are most excited about?

At a macro level it is around shaping the legal/professional firm of the future. We are playing a big role in shaping and leading that, with a focus on reshaping our Industry led service-lines, multi-disciplinary teams, technology, and service delivery.

Personally, I am excited about advancing diversity and inclusion. Within the firm I can use my voice to influence policy, and to make changes. I personally sponsor and mentor high potential minority and women lawyers and business professionals. Externally I speak at conferences and am on the Advisory Committee of Thomson Reuters Transforming Women's Leadership in the Law initiative which is bringing law firm leaders and corporate counsel together to make change.

Baker McKenzie has offices in 46 countries. How much do you travel in a typical year?

I did 16 major trips last year, to offices across the globe. I love the different cultures and contexts. I most enjoyed a trip to California when we opened our Los Angeles office, because my family was able to join me on that trip, and also taking the bullet train from Shanghai to Beijing.

Washington

Principal: Lisa Smith
lisa.smith@fairfaxassociates.com
202.365.4180

California

Principal: Kristin Stark
kristin.stark@fairfaxassociates.com
415.215.9294

London

Principal: Giles Rubens
giles.rubens@fairfaxassociates.com
44 (0)20 3633 3943